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(54) Method and apparatus for a merchandise checkout system

(57) A method and system for a merchandise checkout system utilizes a remote scanning device, a shopping cart and bags for allowing a purchaser to buy merchandise unassisted by store personnel. The remote scanning device reads product identity information from coded levels on products chosen by the purchaser and sends the information to a central processor. The central processor has a memory, which indexes price information and weight for each product based on the product identity information. The central processor sends an accumulated price and weight transaction to the remote scanning device for the purchaser's use. The product identity information on the products further include a security tag device which is deactivated by the remote

scanning device. The purchaser upon completion of their purchases takes their shopping cart to a security station for weighing in on a scale wherein an actual combined weight of the shopping cart, bags and products is compared to a predicted weight determined by the central processor and generating a notification signal if a discrepancy occurs. The security station further verifies that the security tag devices have been deactivated and also generates a notification signal. The purchaser next goes to a payment checkout terminal coupled to the central processor, wherein the payment checkout terminal effects financial transactions including acceptance of payment for transactions initiated by the remote scanning device, and the payment checkout terminal is operable by store personnel only.

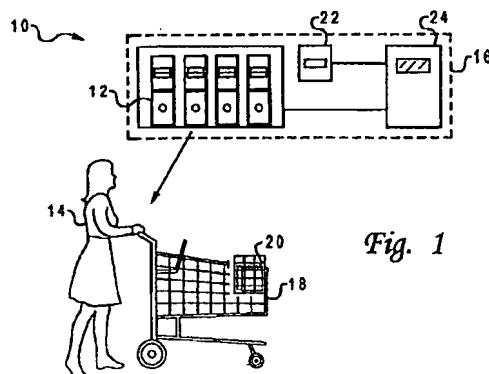


Fig. 1

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Description	
[0001] The present invention is directed to a method and system for merchandise checkouts.	5
[0002] Large retail stores frequently have many checkout lanes in order to be able to handle higher customer throughput at peak periods. Such lanes tend to be crowded together as much as possible in an attempt to minimize the square footage required for the checkout function. Additionally, many of these lanes remain idle during a considerable portion of any given business day and waste the square footage allocated to them.	10
[0003] A modern retail or grocery store checkout lane typically includes a cash register that is used to check out merchandise items bearing bar code labels. A cashier removes items from a movable conveyor belt one at a time, drags them across the laser beam of a fixed scanner (e.g., a "slot" scanner built into a horizontal counter), and places them on a shopping carrier, such as a cart. The fixed scanner is linked with a processor, e.g., a CPU built into the cash register, that translates the bar code symbol on a package into a cash register entry including the price of the scanned item. Downstream of the cash register on the conveyor belt is a sacking station; one or more baggers removes previously scanned items from the conveyor belt and places items in paper or plastic bags. When all items have been scanned or otherwise checked, the cash register tallies the prices of the items, factors in any discounts (e.g., coupon discounts) or other adjustments (e.g., sales taxes on some items), displays the total to be paid by the customer, and prints a receipt. While the purchases are being "run up," the customer may write a cheque to pay for the purchases or deliver a credit card to the cashier.	15
[0004] A problem that arises with the above-described system is the fact that typically only one person at a time empties a shopping cart and scans the items contained therein thereby limiting the efficiency of the process. It is conceivable that two or more people could theoretically share a fixed scanner, but this could easily create physical coordination problems involving each person getting in the other person's way. Long customer lines occur because of the current system of checking out merchandise and this results in wasted time for the consumer. Valuable retail space that could be used for more merchandise is lost in supporting multiple checkout lanes and store revenue is lost in supporting the store staff to handle the operations.	20
[0005] Additionally, shoplifting is a major problem for retail stores, resulting in the loss of millions of pounds each year. The most common type of shoplifting is that in which the shoplifter removes the shoplifted item from a store by wearing the item or by hiding the item on their person or in their bags. One well-known system developed to reduce this type of shoplifting involves attaching a security tag to the items in the store. The security tag contains a circuit or other means that interacts with a	25
detection system located near the exit of the store. The detection system sounds an alarm if an item passes therethrough with a security tag that has not been deactivated. This type of security tag is typically deactivated or removed by a cashier when the item is purchased. The tag is usually deactivated by being passed over an electromagnetic apparatus.	30
[0006] However, a problem arises with this type of security system in that if a store cashier is acting in concert with the shoplifter, the cashier may deactivate or remove the security tags without accepting payment for the items. Typically, the shoplifter will bring a number of purchases to the cashier, who will ring up less than all of the purchases, often discounting the prices on the purchased items. The cashier will then place the remaining unpurchased items in the shoplifter's bags. Prior to placing the items in the bags, the cashier will deactivate the security tags on the stolen items so that the security detection apparatus near the exit of the store will not detect them. Therefore, if a cashier is acting in concert with a shoplifter, it is possible to steal a very large number of items with relative ease.	35
[0007] Accordingly the invention provides method for a merchandise checkout system comprising: providing a purchaser with a remote scanning device for scanning in product identity information; wirelessly transmitting said product identity information to a computer system, said computer system having a price information corresponding to each of said product identity information, said computer system calculating said price information from each of said product identity information to accumulate a total; and providing said total to one of a plurality of terminals when said purchaser is finished.	40
[0008] Such a method speeds up throughput for checking out and paying for multiple items in a high volume store.	45
[0009] In another aspect, the invention provides a system for merchandise checkout comprising: means for remotely scanning product identity information from products chosen by a purchaser; means for wirelessly transmitting said product identity information to a computer system having a memory indexing price information with said product identity information to accumulate a transaction total from a series of products presented for purchase; and means for providing said transaction total to one or a plurality of check-out terminals in response to a presence of said purchaser wherein a payment amount is presented.	50
[0010] A preferred embodiment of the present invention further comprises means for accepting discount coupons from said purchaser and transferring information on said coupons to said computer system for adjusting said indexing price information delivered to said purchaser.	55
[0011] According to the preferred embodiment, the checkout system provides a high level of security in processing purchased merchandise items that enables a self-service operation to occur. The purchaser is able	

Paragraph beginning at line 19 of page 3 has been amended as follows:

In the ~~preferred for one embodiment~~ of the present invention, the start-up phase and the steady state are unified. The trellis shaper chooses a predetermined valid trellis path during the start-up phase irrespective of the criterion for selection of the sub-tree. Once in the steady state, it uses the selection criterion to select the state transition.

Paragraph beginning at line 23 of page 3 has been amended as follows:

The trellis shaping function of ~~the preferred this~~ embodiment is implemented with a linear structure that requires memory for only the nodes at level D of the binary tree. In the steady state phase, for each input spectral shaper frame  $X_{i+D}$  the preferred embodiment computes the path metric associated with each of the  $M^{D+1}$  paths. The node at level  $D+1$  which satisfies the selection criterion is then chosen as the best path. The state transition from the current root node and the subsequent root node is determined by the current trellis state and the best path.

Paragraph beginning at line 30 of page 3 has been amended as follows:

~~The preferred This~~ implementation provides a significant reduction in computation and memory requirements, and the performance penalty as a result is insignificant.

In the Claims:

Claims 1-9 have been amended as follows:

1. (Amended) A method of coding digital data for transmission according to a trellis coding system having a predetermined number of (N) states and a predetermined number of (M) state transitions from each state, wherein the data is arranged in a series of frames, a state is associated with each frame to determine a coding strategy for the frame, and a look-ahead depth (D) representing a number of data frames is selected, ~~characterised by the step comprising:~~

assigning an initial state for a first frame of the series of data frames, and assigning states for the subsequent data frames in the series of data frames up to the look-ahead depth according to a predetermined valid trellis path; ~~the method further including:~~

sequentially fetching subsequent data frames in the series and determining respective states therefor based on a path metric for state transitions computed over the number of frames represented by the look-ahead depth; and

coding the data frames for transmission according to the coding strategies corresponding to the states assigned or determined for the frames, wherein the series of data frames are coded for a shaped spectrum upon transmission thereof.

2. (Amended) The method of A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein fetched data frames are buffered over said look-ahead depth from a current frame  $X_i$  to a look-ahead depth frame  $X_{i+D}$ .

3. (Amended) The method of A method as claimed in claim 2, wherein node information for nodes representing possible state transitions at the look-ahead depth are stored in a node memory in an ordered array, and wherein the coding strategy for the current data frame  $X_i$  is determined on the basis of a node selected at the look-ahead depth according to said path metric.

4. (Amended) The method of A method as claimed in claim 3, wherein the node information in said node memory is replaced for each new data frame in the series.

5. (Amended) The method of A method as claimed in claim 3, wherein the coding strategy for the current data frame  $X_i$  is determined according to a state transition from the state associated with said current frame which~~that~~ is determined by a comparison of the position of the node selected at the look-ahead depth with at least one predetermined threshold.

6. (Amended) A data encoder for generating spectrally-shaped coded data according to a trellis coding system, wherein the data ~~is are~~ arranged in a series of data frames from a data source and a trellis state is associated with each data frame such that a coding scheme for each frame may be determined on the basis of transitions of states for frames over a selected look-ahead depth (D) comprising:

a buffer memory coupled to the data source for buffering data frames in the series of data frames by the selected look-ahead depth (D);

a metric computation and trellis extension engine coupled to sequentially receive said data frames from the data source and determine node information in a plurality of nodes for each said frame representing possible states, state transitions from a preceding frame, and path metrics for the state transitions;

a current state storage coupled to the metric computation and trellis extension engine for storing the state of a current frame in the series of data frames;

a node memory coupled to the metric computation and trellis extension engine for storing said node information for nodes of a frame succeeding the current frame by the look-ahead depth;

a coding scheme memory for storing a correlation between state transitions and respective coding schemes; and

a processing circuit coupled to the coding scheme memory and to the metric computation and trellis extension engine for applying a selected coding scheme to a data frame to generate spectrally-shaped coded data;

~~wherein~~—said metric computation and trellis extension engine determines is configured to determine the selected coding scheme for the current frame according to the state stored in the current state storage and a node for the frame succeeding the current frame by the look-ahead depth ~~which~~that is selected on the basis of the path metric for the node, characterised by:

the metric computation and trellis extension engine assigning an initial state for a first frame of the series of data frames, and assigning states for the subsequent data frames in the series of data frames up to the look-ahead depth according to a predetermined valid trellis path.

7. (Amended) The encoder of An encoder as claimed in claim 6 wherein, for the first frames within the look-ahead depth of the series of data frames, states and state transitions are assigned according to a predetermined valid trellis path.

8. (Amended) The encoder of claim 6, An encoder as claimed in claim 6 or 7, wherein for each said data frame received by the metric computation and trellis extension engine the node information in the node memory is replaced with new node information representing the received data frame and the possible state transitions from the preceding data frame.

9. (Amended) The encoder of An encoder as claimed in claim 8, wherein the node information for the nodes is stored in linear array in said node memory, and wherein the coding scheme for the current frame is determined according to the position of the selected node within the node memory linear array.

receiving scanned and unwanted products by said purchaser and updating said remote scanning device with said computer system to reflect an adjusted price total to said purchaser.

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10. The system of Claim 9, further comprising means for replacing said product identity information and said security tag device with a new product identity information and security tag device for said unwanted products. 10

11. The system of any of Claims 7 to 10 comprising: means (86) for generating self-adhesive bar coded labels (90), said bar coded labels indicative of a product code corresponding to produce (80) wherein said self-adhesive bar coded labels (90) are printed and dispensed after said produce is placed and weighed in produce bags (84) and said self-adhesive bar coded labels are attached to said produce bags and scanned. 15 20

12. The system for merchandise checkout according to Claim 11 further comprising means (92) for verifying that said produce bags are properly weighed, labeled and read by said remote scanning device by said purchaser. 25

13. An apparatus for use in a merchandise checkout system (10) comprising: 30

a remote scanning device (12) operable to read product identity information on products (26); said remote scanning device for wirelessly transmitting said product identity information to a computer system (24); and said remote scanning device deactivating security measures associated with said products. 35

14. The apparatus of Claim 12 or 13 wherein said remote scanning device reads said product identity information using infra-red technology to scan coded levels on said products. 40

15. The apparatus of Claim 12, 13 or 14, wherein said remote scanning device comprises a radio frequency (RF) transceiver for sending and updating said product identity information to said computer system. 45

16. The apparatus of any of claims 12 to 15, wherein said remote scanning device launches an electromagnetic pulse for deactivating said security measures associated with said products. 50

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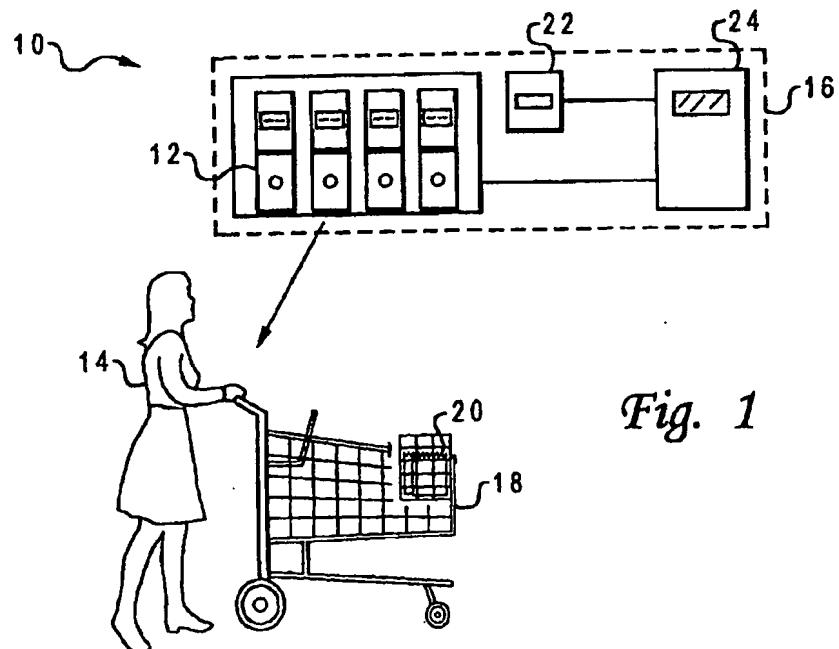


Fig. 1

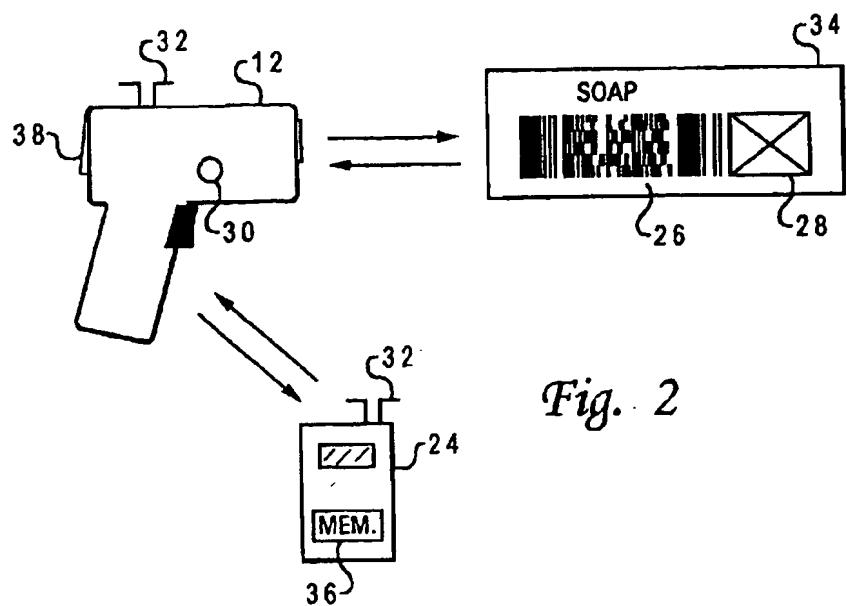
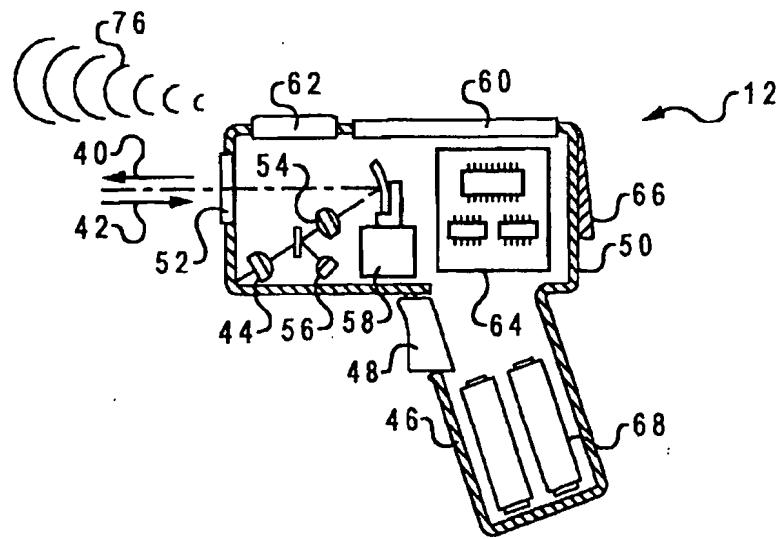
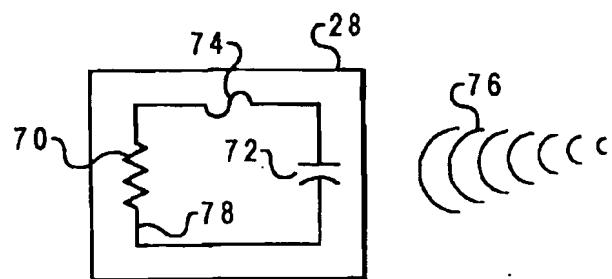


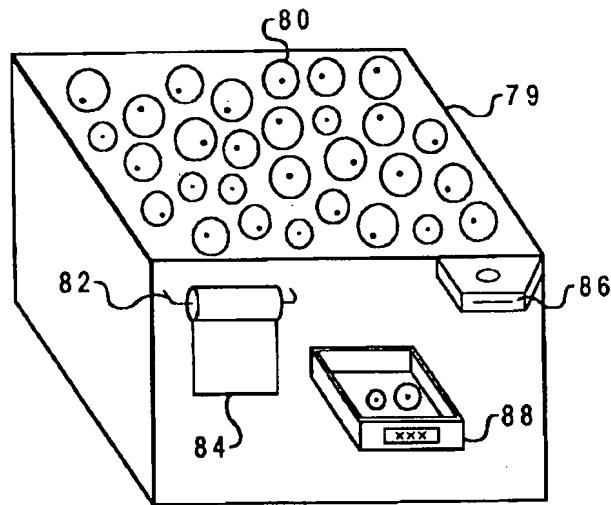
Fig. 2



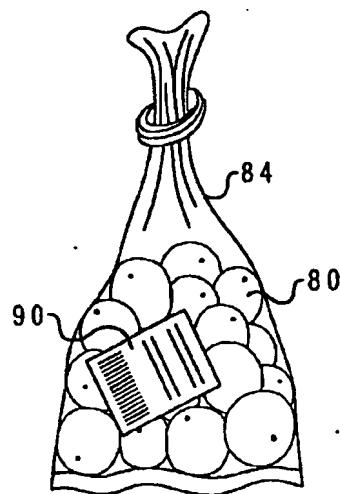
*Fig. 3*



*Fig. 4*



*Fig. 5A*



*Fig. 5B*

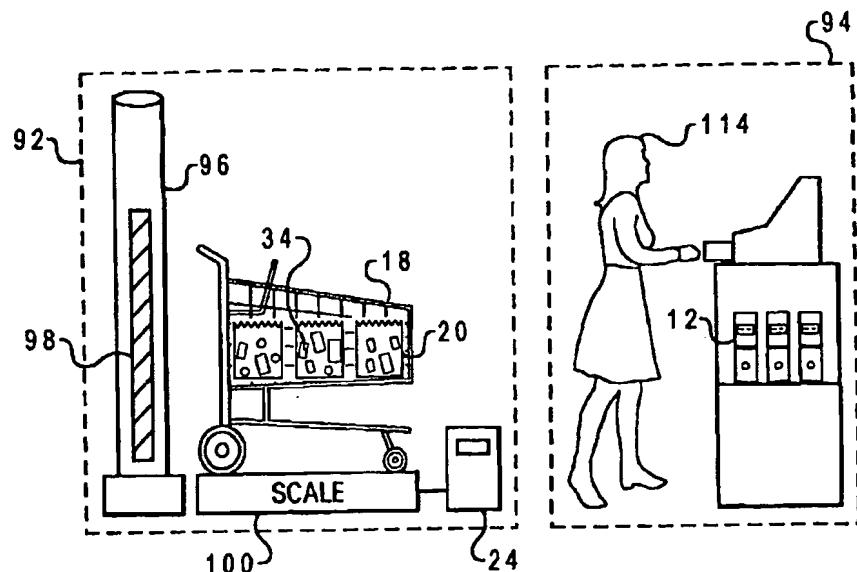


Fig. 6

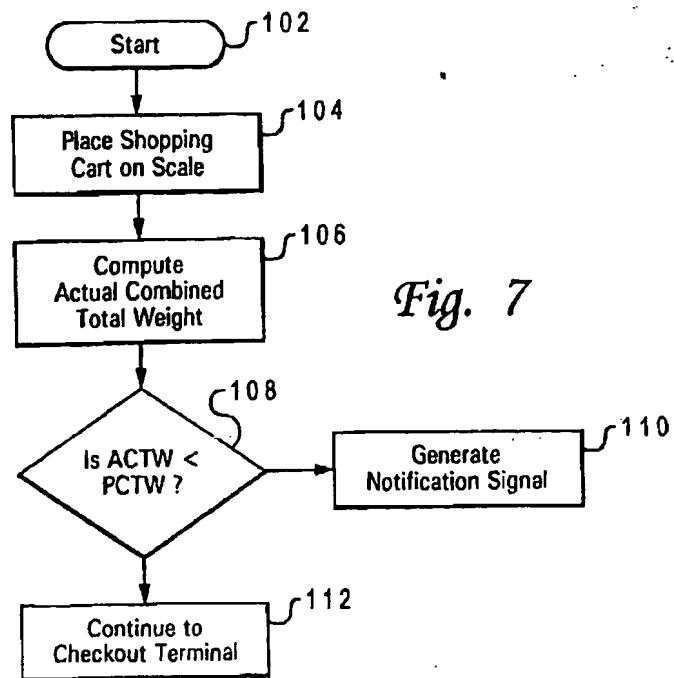


Fig. 7